

Date: September 27, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32

Title: GET INTO ACTION

When I read the story about the man who had two sons in today's scripture, I think of defiance. The man went to the first one and said, "Son, I want you to work in the vineyard today." The son was in a somewhat rebellious mood and he answered with a thick tone of sarcasm, "I will not!" I know what would have happened to me, if I had answered my father like that, but that's what this boy did. Then, he regretted he had answered his father like that and went to the vineyard and did what his father requested.

The father then went to the second son, and made the same request of him. The second son replied somewhat indifferently, "I will, sir." But, his answer was worse! It's worse, because he never did what his father requested. He was polite. The problem is, he never went to the vineyard.

Jesus asks, "Now, which son did the will of his father," the defiant son who said he wouldn't work, but did, or the polite one who said he would work, but didn't? You can't always judge character, by good manners. Many people have been misjudged, on the basis of their etiquette.

In this parable we see two types of people. **The response of the first son was defiance.** "No, I won't go. How dare you ask me to do that! You know I have plans with my friends."

Many of us, who are parents, have encountered that kind of response, at some time or another. Some people, whether young or old, have a stubborn streak in them, that causes them to rebel, no matter how harmless the request.

A four-year-old child named Melissa, had that streak of stubbornness. Melissa saw the classic movie *The Ten Commandments*, on TV a few years back. She learned from that movie, one of God's names is "I Am." For days after, Melissa strode around the house announcing, "I am not!"

Former competitive swimmer and nine-time Olympic champion Mark Spitz might have had a touch of that stubbornness. Spitz, won seven gold medals at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, all in world record time. This was an achievement that lasted for 36 years, until it was surpassed by Michael Phelps, who won eight gold medals at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

Some of you may also remember, in an era when other swimmers were shaving their body hair, Spitz swam with a moustache. When asked why he grew a moustache Spitz stated, "I grew the moustache because a coach in college said I couldn't grow one." Did you ever know someone like that, who did things just because they were told not to?

A coach of the Soviet Union team, once asked Mark Spitz, whether having a moustache in the pool slowed him down. Spitz replied in jest, NO, *in fact*, Mark said, it deflected water from his mouth, which made him even faster. Then he added, his moustache was the actual reason he was such a terrific swimmer. Spitz was just joking,

but the Soviet coach took him seriously. The following year, the entire Soviet team grew moustaches. All because a coach told, Mark Spitz, he couldn't have one.

Maybe you have a member of your family, who has a little streak of stubbornness? We all know people, whose first response to anything, is always "No!" Fortunately, many of these contentious people, have good hearts, and if they have time to reconsider, and see the worth of a project, they'll eventually pitch in and be among the best workers. That was the first son, in the parable Jesus told. He was initially defiant, but after reflecting on his father's request, he changed his mind, put on his work clothes, and went out into the vineyard.

The response of the second son, was really much worse, than his older brother's defiance, even though he was polite and insincere. The second son was like many of us. There are many people who are nice, friendly, basically Christian people, who will never argue, when asked to do something, never even protest, and yet, getting them to actually do anything, is a nearly impossible.

Years ago, I read the City of Miami, FL. established a municipal beautification committee. They appointed twenty-five members to it. But word got around, and it seems that everyone wanted to belong to that committee. Request after request was granted, until 131 citizens were appointed, to the municipal beautification committee. Then, the committee had a meeting to get organized, and begin to work. Only nineteen members showed up. People wanted to belong to the committee, but they didn't want to do the work involved.

The younger son said, he would work in the vineyard, but he never did. Now, Jesus wasn't interested in giving us a lesson, in family life. He was talking about, what it means to follow him. And what it means is, it's time to get into action. It's time to put our work clothes on and get out into the vineyard. It's not enough to be a nice, polite person. There are already too many nice, polite people, who never get out into the vineyard.

The Good Samaritan was not "good" because he had good manners and studied his Sunday school lesson, as important as these practices are. Jesus called him good, because he saw a stranger in need, and went to his aid.

The man who built his life on a rock was praised, not because he had the right theology, but because, as Jesus said, "He hears my words and does them" (Matthew 7:24).

"Hearing" is important, and that's why I deliver a sermon/message every Sunday, but hearing is in vain without "doing." Believing is important, but as the Scriptures tell us, "even the demons believe, and tremble." As the epistle of James puts it so clearly, "Faith without works is dead" (2:17).

No matter how spiritual, we may seem to be, if we are not willing, to minister to the needs of people around us, we're no better, than the rich man at whose gate, sat the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man, didn't abuse Lazarus, in any way, as far as we know. The sin that caused the rich man, after his death, to wake up in torment in Hades, was him walking right by Lazarus every morning, never seeing him. He ignored Lazarus, living in misery, at his own gate, and did nothing.

That's what Paul meant, when he said, "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing . . ." (I Cor. 13:2)

A close reading of the Gospels will reveal, that Jesus intended his followers, to get into action, serving the world as he served the world. I don't mean Jesus wanted us to keep busy, just for the sake of keeping busy. I've seen churches like that. They have a terrific calendar of activities, but very few of those activities are meaningful, in bringing people closer, to the kingdom of God. Jesus meant for us, to give witness, to our inner experience, of God's presence in our lives, through outward service.

During the Revolutionary War, a young man is reported to have come to George Washington and said: "General Washington, I want you to know that I believe in you and your cause. I fully support you."

Washington graciously thanked him and asked the young man, "What regiment are you in? Under whose command do you serve? What uniform do you wear?" The young man answered, "Oh, I'm not in the army. I'm just a civilian."

The general replied, "Young man, if you believe in me and my cause, then you join the army. You put on a uniform. You get yourself a rifle and you fight."

That's Christ's summons to us. We have not been called to be pious saints, sitting in the corner with hands folded, in complacent contemplation. We're called to be soldiers, in the army of Christ. If we believe in Jesus Christ, and the cause for which Jesus died, then we are called, to take up Jesus cross, and walk in Jesus' footsteps, doing those good things, Jesus would do, if Jesus were with us, in the flesh, today.

Now, you may be thinking, "I get it, pastor. I'm supposed to go out and work in the vineyard. I'm supposed to follow Jesus more closely. I'm supposed to serve others, as he did. I really have good intentions, but where does the power come from, to enable a person to make that kind of commitment, to serve Christ?" **The power to make that kind of change in our lives, comes from Christ alone.**

None of us have the power, to fulfill Christ's call, on our own. There's probably not a person hearing this message, who doesn't have good intentions, about being a better person, but the desire to accomplish that goal, is not enough. We must see ourselves in this story of the two sons, who were asked by their father to go into the vineyard, and ask, which of the two brothers, do we more resemble, the one who rebelled at first, but finally did his father's work, or the son who said, "Sure, I'll go," but never did. Then we must ask God, for the courage, and the commitment, to leave our comfort zone, and seek to walk more closely, in the steps of the Jesus Christ.

Dr. Mickey Anders tells about a country song by Keni Thomas titled, "Not Me," that speaks to the resistance, that many of us exhibit.

The first verse of the song says volunteers are needed for the children's baseball team, and every dad is thinking, "Not me."

And the song says, "this league is built on coaches, who stood right there and said, 'Not me, not me, no way. With this job of mine, I could never find the time. Not me. Not me.'"

And the chorus says, “The world becomes a better place when someone stands and leads the way. Steps forward, when they’d rather say, ‘Not me.’”

The second verse talks about a family of children, whose parents have died. There’s no next of kin, so all the children go to the oldest sister who said, “I’ll raise them’ while a voice inside her screamed, ‘Not me. Not me. I can’t believe what’s happening. This isn’t how it’s supposed to be. Not me. Not me.’”

And the chorus adds, “The world becomes a better place, when someone stands and leads the way. Steps forward when they’d rather say, ‘Not me.’”

The world is a better place, because of the contributions of a host of people who at first said, “Not me,” but eventually did what God called them to do.

Listen very carefully, to the voice of Christ, this morning. Is there something that Christ has been asking you to do, something for the church, something in your neighborhood, something in your family, but you have been saying, “Not me.” Isn’t it time, for you to join the older son, put on your work clothes and get into the vineyard? Let’s listen to God, and then, get into action for Christ, Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.